

GREY'S ANATOMY

The concrete box this Jo'burg couple calls home proves that modernism can be both stylish and comfortable

Text Naomi Larkin Production Sarah Buitendach, Elsa Young Photographs Elsa Young



THIS PAGE Doors spanning the width of the house fold away, opening the lounge and dining area to the concrete patio, lawn and swimming pool. OPPOSITE The long wooden dining table where Gregory and Caryn Katz entertain is from Weylandts (086-010-3400). The bench was picked up at a second-hand store in Kensington and the chairs are from Boardmans (011-244-8780).



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Gregory Katz's enthusiasm for concrete is not just evident throughout his home, but also in the passionate way he speaks about it, and in his ability to rework this commonplace medium into something decidedly sexy. The Johannesburg-based architect has designed three stand-alone, identical concrete houses, side-by-side on Lot 424 in the leafy suburb of Norwood. The middle house, which he shares with his wife Caryn, an actress, is essentially an envelope. It has no load-bearing walls, an architectural feat only possible using concrete, and thanks to the skill of builders Dextro Products. 'I love the solidity of concrete,' says Gregory. 'Its strength allows for structural gymnastics such as heroic cantilevers and huge spans. Bigger openings mean more light, more openness, greater flow. I love the truthfulness of the material; it bears the marks and impressions of its making.'

The exterior of the house projects minimalist modernity, but once inside you discover a home not only stamped with the couple's unique style, but one that's comfortably lived in. 'Concrete works like a neutral canvas so any colour introduced seems to make it vibrate with warmth,' says Caryn. 'We have big, well-worn pieces of furniture, lots of framed candid-camera-style photographs that Greg and I took, bowls of colourful sweets dotted around (my father owns Sweets from Heaven) and always a big bowl of bananas.' Yellow is a recurring hue. The kitchen, which partly opens onto the lounge, stands out from the grey of the rest of the structure because of its bright yellow cupboards. The choice of shade, Plascon's Panorama Lights (Y4-AI-2), which Gregory agonised over, was inspired by a 1960s kitchen in a Killarney apartment block, and because 'yellow is a happy colour'.

Windows and curtains are kept open to allow natural light and air to flow through the house. Downstairs, stack-away doors, which span the width of the house, lead out onto a concrete patio, lawn and long, narrow swimming pool (Gregory loves doing laps), creating true indoor-outdoor flow. Even when they are closed there is still

THIS PAGE, LEFT In the kitchen, concrete counter tops, finished with the same sealant as the concrete floor, provide a smooth feel and make a hygienic work surface. The dishwasher, washing machine and dryer are all Bosch. **RIGHT** Windows and curtains are kept open to maximise the light and the flow of fresh air through the house. **OPPOSITE** Caryn prepares strawberries in the happy, yellow kitchen. The kitchen was done by Heavenly Kitchens (011-802-5203).



a panoramic view of the outdoors. The boundary wall behind the pool, which fronts the three properties, has the same concrete finish as the lounge, ensuring visual continuity. The lawn is a favourite play space for the couple's niece and nephew. Both Gregory and Caryn are natural entertainers ('We like to cook together,' she says) and the long, wooden dining table in the open-plan dining and lounge area is where friends and family congregate, often spilling onto the patio beyond. 'I make a mean stew while Caryn is the health nut – she's much better with the vegetables and the healthy stuff,' says Gregory. 'We serve wine and single malt whiskies ... things can get quite festive when we entertain!'

The stark lines and choice of materials haven't rendered the space soulless – or overly masculine. Caryn unreservedly labels the main bedroom her favourite area in the house, and it's easy to see why. The sleep zone is linked to the luxuriously spaced bathroom via a walk-through dressing room lined with built-in cupboards. 'Greg is very neat, whereas I enjoy clutter. The pedestal on my side of the bed usually holds a vase of flowers, cards, about six or seven books, my rings and various knick-knacks,' says Caryn. 'Greg's has just his light and the book he's reading at the time.'

This personality-filled concrete home is a welcome new take on cluster living, which still offers security, shared maintenance and a sense of community. Innovative materials, bold splashes of colour and cutting-edge architecture make it the perfect fit for a stylish and forward-thinking young Jo'burg couple. □

Gregory Katz Architecture, 083-444-5515; Dextro Products (builders) ???-???-????



GREGORY'S HOME TRUTHS

The buildings I wish I'd designed are Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University and the public toilets at the Market Theatre in Jo'burg.

The design I'm most proud of is my wife's engagement ring.

My favourite getaway is Cape Town.

My interiors motto is 'A pure enjoyment of space in which objects can be placed and taken away in an ever-changing spatial collage'.

My most treasured piece of furniture is our Eames plywood lounge chair.

In my CD player right now is Bob Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks*.

My top restaurant is Morningview Health Shop & Café in Sandton.

My favourite room in our house is my office-cum-library. It is an open, flowing variety of unique spaces.

CARYN'S HOME TRUTHS

My favourite designers are Philippa Green, Ida Elsje, Gregor Jenkin, and Caren and Gina Waldman.

I get organic foodie items from the Bryanston Organic Market, and Fruits and Roots.

My secret talent is singing!

My pet design hate is oversized and matching things, and boring cookie-cutter choices.

Building my own home has taught me never to miss an episode of *Grand Designs* on BBC Prime.

The creatives I have my eye on this year are artist Ryan Arenson, and designers Bianca Hansen from Boudoir Frocks and Samantha Veldman from Coat.



THIS PAGE The lounge demonstrates the couple's eclectic style: a prized Eames plywood chair is paired with carved wooden animals bought off the side of the road in Houghton and Czech crystal candleholders. On the wall is an intricate pencil sketch by Ryan Arenson, a collage by Gina Waldman and a photograph by Ida Elsje. OPPOSITE, TOP The painting on the wall of the main bedroom is a Lippy Lipschitz still life, circa 1946, and the framed photographs on the concrete shelf are of family. The bed linen – Egyptian cotton from Holland – was a wedding present. BOTTOM Gregory runs his architecture practice from his upstairs, open-plan office, which also allows him to showcase his home to prospective clients.

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AN INNOVATIVE USE OF MATERIALS

THIS PAGE Gregory relaxes on the sofa from Coricraft (021-505-6640). The chair is from Weylandts, the lamp from Radiant Lighting (011-386-0000) and the rug from Rowley & Hughes (021-441-0075). **OPPOSITE, TOP** The upstairs windows are flush with the exterior walls, forming inner windowsills that are perfect for displaying knick-knacks. **BOTTOM** The concrete staircase appears suspended thanks to a 'courageous engineer' who used steel profiles welded to shape.

Create horizontal surfaces. Gregory has generated a series of flat, solid concrete shelves that jut out from the walls without any support structures. A counter across the back wall in the lounge serves as a sideboard. The surface is covered with assorted ornaments and a collection of decanters, while a small shelf underneath houses the sound system and CDs.

Rethink the uses for existing materials. The edge of the pool and the base of the house are skirted in the curved, concrete blocks used for road curbing. This has a dual aesthetic and practical purpose as the sloping helps water run-off. 'We take everyday base objects and elevate them. I call it alchemy,' says Gregory.

Make magic with lighting. Fluorescent lights are mounted in the boundary walls but are not visible from the outside. Instead you see mailbox-like slots, which at night give out a mysterious light. Likewise, the lounge counter is lit from beneath, allowing light to filter up through the spaces between objects.

Keep flooring luxurious and homogeneous. Aesthetically, concrete surpasses screed for industrial-style beauty because the grinding and polishing process exposes flecks of glass, similar to terrazzo but more uniform in tone, and there are none of the cracks associated with screeding. Plus the solid slab retains the warmth released by the underfloor heating, making it cost- and energy-efficient.